

Happiness Pony

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Worcester: a utopian, labyrinthine community.

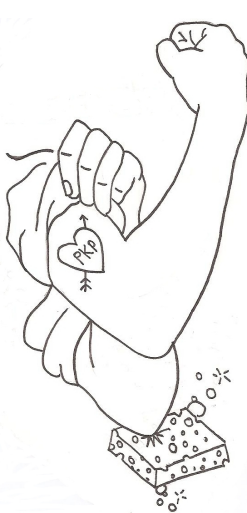
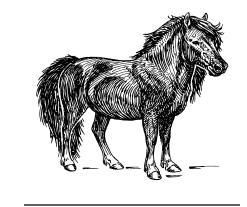
December 2011



Craftershock!!
Alternative Craft Fair
Presented by
Worcester Roller Derby
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December 18
11am-5pm
34 Suffolk Street
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A day filled with food, fun,
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You Are Theseus

Pirithous was the kind of friend your parents warn you about. He was the kind of guy who invites centaurs to his wedding—knowing full well that the first rule of centaurs is don't invite them anywhere alcohol is served—and asks your help in killing them after they kidnap his wife.

Because you're a hero past your prime, and you've sworn a vow of eternal friendship, and—above all else—you're Theseus, the man who invented the mullet, the latest plan seems so good: Pirithous will help you kidnap one daughter of Zeus—the beautiful Helen—and then you'll help him kidnap another—Persephone.

Helen proved easy to take—it helped that she was only 10—and you left the most beautiful girl in the world in care of your mother. Then off for the more difficult prize: Persephone.

Most people would have waited 'til winter had passed and Persephone was out of Hades and back on Olympus. Not you.

So down to the Underworld, to charming Hades, who invites you both to sit. And sit you do, on the Seat of Forgetfulness, stuck on your bottoms for many months. You can't remember why you're there, or how long you've been there.

When Heracles finally rescues you, he leaves bits of you behind. He rips you so hard he leaves pieces of your butt stuck to the Seat of Forgetfulness. And he leaves behind your friend, Pirithous, the cause for your months of exile and all the other adventures of your middle age.

You return to Athens half-assed and in disgrace. Someone else has replaced you as king, and no one really wants you back. Your wife Helen has been spirited back to Sparta, to wait for another kidnapping. Your mother has become her slave, destined to follow her to Sparta, then to Troy, and back again.

Only your death will restore the fondness your people had for you. (Nicole Apostola)

Gentlemen, Start Your Beards

The second installment of Whiskerite, Worcester's premiere charity beard competition, is coming up in 2012. Registration is \$5; that and all other money raised will be donated to the Worcester County Food Bank. Everyone is encouraged to start at zero: shave your face clean December 16, 2011, take a photo for proof, and enter at [facebook.com/Whiskerite](https://www.facebook.com/Whiskerite) or whiskerite@gmail.com. The competition date is uncertain as of press time. Categories of competition include most massive beard, most creative beard, crappiest beard, and Best in Show.

Recent Highlights in Worcester Civil Disobedience

On November 5, 2011, 17 people were intentionally arrested, and five unintentionally arrested, when Occupy Worcester tried to camp on Worcester Common.

The last time a comparable number of people were arrested for civil disobedience in Worcester was June 12, 1985, when 18 were arrested at the Federal Building as part of a protest against American policy in Nicaragua. An additional 10 people had been arrested there in a similar protest a month before, on May 7, 1985. (Mike Benedetti)

Icelandic Political Note

Reykjavík Mayor Jón Gnarr, a member of Iceland's satirical *Besti flokkurinn* or "Best Party," announced in 2010 that he would only go into partnerships with politicians who had seen all five seasons of "The Wire."

News
Newfoundland was a separate country, equal in status to the rest of Canada, from 1907 to 1949.

§
In 1985, Nobel laureate Kary Mullis spoke with a glowing, green raccoon.

§
On May 13, 1985, Philadelphia police attempted to evict and arrest members of the black liberation group MOVE from a row house. After a 90-minute battle in which the authorities used tear gas, water cannons, and fired 10,000 rounds of ammunition, a police helicopter dropped a small bomb on the roof of the house. The resulting fire destroyed 65 houses and killed five children and six adults. Two weeks later, Philadelphia Mayor Wilson Goode was the commencement speaker at Holy Cross and received an honorary degree.

§
President John Tyler, born in 1790, has two grandsons who are still alive today.

§
Before Pope John Paul I in 1978, there had been a period of more than 1,000 years in which no pope had taken a new papal name—every name from 914 to 1978 was at least a 11. The last one to do so before John Paul I was Pope Lando in 913. There has yet to be a Lando II.



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HAPPINESS PONY Income Statement November 2011	
Revenue	
Donations from editors	\$92.49
Ad sales	\$0.00
Other donations	\$0.00
Expenses	
500 copies	\$91.38
Test copies	\$1.11
Net Income	\$0.00

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I was just driving along one day, just driving along, when I saw the exit for Savannah.

I had my old '86 Oldsmobile wagon, a huge monster of a car that could carry our family of four and the dog in air-conditioned comfort an easy 600 miles a day. It was coffee time, late morning after an early start in Coco Beach. Savannah had a reputation, a vibe that led me to believe there might be decent coffee available, and a double shot Americano was what I needed. We had plenty of time to get back to Worcester, so a little side trip to a classic southern city on the banks of the Wilmington River felt like a good idea. As with many experiences in life, unexpected things happen, black swan events, and sometimes a cup of coffee unexpectedly leads to an epiphany, a new direction, a re-boot, or a well-deserved kick in the ass.

I was hurting. This spontaneous side-trip into Savannah on our way home from summer vacation at the beach was a last-ditch attempt to not go back to the regular routine. Always too much to do, bogged down in the mundane: mow the lawn, fix the shed door, weed the garden, get ready for school to start next week. Sure, a lot of people would kill for a chance at a nice middle-class American suburban life. It looks good on TV, right? I once peeked in the door of a drum tower in Zhaoxing Dong village, China, where all the old men hung out and watched the one TV in town. They had a satellite dish on the side of this ancient meeting house where, one supposes, they used to do some kind of drum ceremony. Now they just sit around smoking and watching TV and presumably wishing they had cars and iPhones and never had to harvest rice again. Or maybe I just wish they were thinking that so that I could feel better about feeling bad about my boring life.

Maybe they were actually thinking about how beautiful the river was, and how good the mud in the rice paddies feels when it squishes around your toes, and how pleasant it is in the sunshine on the hillside overlooking your handmade home. I don't know, but I do know that when I drove into downtown Savannah with the kids and the dog in the back seat and my partner who I trust with my whole life sitting beside me, I was truly hoping for one last summer adventure, that certain shift of focus, the kind that changes everything.

When the highway devolved into city streets, I pointed the car towards the "Downtown Historic District." We came



upon an area of beautiful old buildings with shady porches and secret gardens, the sidewalks lined with lush, Spanish-moss-filled oak trees, pocket parks here and there where dogs could play and people could relax and breathe and surrender to the overflowing humidity. As we drove past one of the parks, we found our perfect coffee place: The Sentient Bean. Espresso drinks, vegan-friendly, and positively exuding the Savannahesque, laid-back-summer, no hurry, no worry life of contemplation I was craving. We got some coffee and food, our amazingly self-sufficient children took the dog over to the park, and all of a sudden, just like that, life was good. Just sitting, enjoying the coffee buzz, focusing on feeling free and almost getting there.

Paula saw on the map that there was an early 1800s cemetery down by the river. She is fascinated by ancient cemeteries, and mostly I try to avoid being dragged along, but something about the trees and the river and the feeling of being in the Old South appealed to me, so we gathered up the kids and the dog and the extra coffee and set off to find the Bonaventure Cemetery. It's a little outside of town, and we had to go through lots of cozy-looking neighborhoods, shaded by huge trees. Quiet, with little grocery stores on the corners, laundry hanging out to dry in the patches of sunlight, and a feeling of moldy decrepitness.

We entered through grand stone and metal gates, and began to explore. We were pretty much the only people there, and it was quiet and warm and beautiful, and you could smell a hint of the ocean in the breeze. I struck off on my own, not having the patience to try and decipher the lichen-covered inscriptions on the tombs, distracted by the dread brought on by our imminent departure,

the long drive back to Massachusetts, and the return to "normal" life. I needed just a little more time to myself, to try and find some peace, or better yet, a new way forward.

As I walked up the bluff by the river, I noticed a bench beside some gravestones. Approaching the bench, feeling dazed from too much inner conflict and caffeine, I noticed that the bench was, in fact, a memorial to Conrad Aiken, a semi-famous author and poet. I vaguely remembered his name from a poetry unit I did in 11th grade, the year my English teacher encouraged a skinny, estranged, and horribly shy kid to write his first poetry. So I walked over. It was engraved with lots of words. And there, on the left-hand side, were these words:

COSMOS MARINER DESTINATION UNKNOWN

I was stunned, dizzy, like I was about to fall into the abyss. Then, I started laughing, like Donnie Darko right before the jet engine crashes into his bedroom, and for much the same reason—I finally knew that no matter what happened, I always have been and always will be just a cosmos mariner sailing along on starship Earth, and what happens after this life is unknowable, and it is totally OK. Beyond OK, I should say, because I realized something I had always known but had never been able to put into words until I stumbled across a random bench on the bluff above a river in a town I might never have gone to had I not been craving a cup of joe. So thank you, Conrad, for letting me know from beyond the grave that I am flying through the universe on an incredible adventure whose endpoint is inescapable, so I might as well savor every single moment on the journey.

Speaking of which, I think it's time for another cup of coffee.

(words by Gray Harrison; photo by Mark Coggins/Creative Commons Attribution license)